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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [HR](#) [POLITICAL](#) [PARTIES](#)
SUBJECT: SDP NOMINATES JURCIC AS CANDIDATE FOR PRIME
MINISTER

REF: ZAGREB 546

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT A.BRADTKE FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The opposition Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP) has nominated economics professor and Former Minister of Economy Ljubo Jurcic as its candidate for Prime Minister. Although not altogether new in Croatia, the idea of separating the role of PM from that of Party President was initially backed by the recently deceased former PM and SDP chief Ivica Racan. On July 10, SDP officially accepted the idea of separating the roles under the proposal of new Party President Zoran Milanovic (ref A). Despite Jurcic's nomination, Milanovic's name will still be first on candidate lists in all districts at parliamentary elections expected in November. While a popular figure, Jurcic is not a politician, and he is an untested campaigner. He has already been criticized by some for what they see as a backward economic outlook, his failure to clean up privatization during his tenure as Economic Minister, and his mishandling of a discussion of his family's role in WWII. By teaming him with the youthful, ambitious, Milanovic, the SDP risks squandering its current lead in the polls, and confusing voters as to what the party stands for. END SUMMARY.

DIVIDING PRIME MINISTER AND PARTY PRESIDENT ROLES

12. (U) On July 10, the Chief Committee of the main opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) accepted professor Ljubo Jurcic as its candidate for PM. Earlier in the year Jurcic had presented his economic program, which promotes regionally-based industrialization. Although not officially an SDP party member until May 2007, Jurcic was originally backed for the PM job by Racan, who died in late April. Milanovic, Racan's youthful associate and loyal supporter, immediately accepted the idea of separating the positions of PM and party President, offering "teamwork" as an alternative to a super-powerful PM. Despite opinions in the party that he himself would perhaps be a better PM choice, Milanovic kept his word, proposing to the Chief Committee that it select Jurcic instead.

13. (U) At the same time, Milanovic proposed that the Committee appoint himself as the "bearer" of SDP tickets in all electoral districts, which the Committee accepted, too. In practical terms, this means that Milanovic's name will appear at the top of every ballot, regardless of whether or not he runs in a given district. Despite doubts about its democratic legitimacy, Croatian political parties across the spectrum have widely used this legal provision. Milanovic described this decision as a "clear act of claiming responsibility for election results." He has clearly decided to play on his current new-kid-on-the-block popularity, at a time when polls continue to give his party advantage over the ruling HDZ. Speaking at the Committee meeting, Milanovic

pointed out the need to reinforce the role of parliament, which immediately led observers to conclude that he was aiming to become the Speaker of Parliament.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While scoring well in the opinion polls for his honesty and integrity, Jurcic is a soft spoken academic and not a politician. He lacks the skills of a tested campaigner, and is unlikely to match up well against Prime Minister Sanader. Already there is criticism of Jurcic's economic program for relying too heavily on re-industrialization and of his past lackluster record as Minister of Economy. His reference in a recent interview to several uncles who fought for the Ustasha movement also demonstrated a certain political naivete and forced him to respond defensively (albeit correctly) about his own long-standing anti-fascist and social democratic views.

¶5. (C) A further complication will be how well Jurcic and the brash, outspoken and ambitious Milanovic will work together. Riding sympathy after the death of Racan, and Milanovic's popularity as a new face, the SDP has opened up a lead in polls. However, by dividing the leadership between the two such different persons, and SDP risks opening itself to criticism and attack over who is really in charge. END COMMENT.
BRADTKE